

THE MASTERS COLLECTION™

By EPYX®

The Legend of BLACKSILVER™

Hero's Handbook

Instruction Manual
for the Apple® II series,
Commodore 64®/128™,
IBM® PC and compatibles

A Call to Adventure



I am no longer a simple serf. Since my special dream, nothing has been the same. It was amazingly real. Princess Aylea, daughter of the King of all Thalen, had come specially to me.

"We need a hero," whispered the beautiful Princess. "We need one warrior to succeed where many have failed." In my sleepy dream state I must have responded, "Why me?" for she told me, "Sleep quietly while I tell the story."

"Baron Taragas has found Blacksilver in his infernal mines, and I fear for the safety of us all," she said. "Imagine it. Blacksilver! The power to raise mountains and empty the very seas. The power to destroy our lands."

"My father raised a great army to march against Taragas, but was kidnapped before he could lead the charge. Now the Wizard Seravol counsels me that an army can never succeed. I must choose one person, one special warrior." After saying but a few more words, the Princess pressed a feather into my hand, and departed in the way of dreams . . . a whisper . . . a memory.

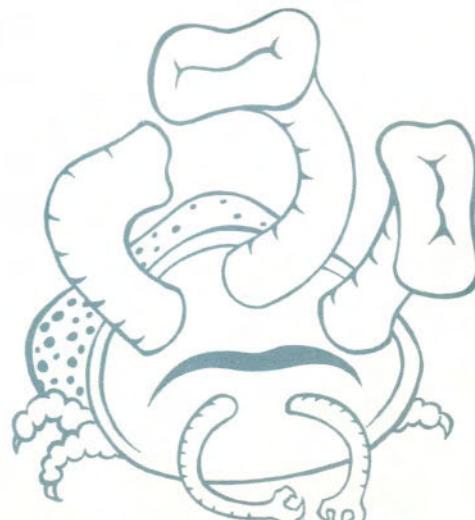
Thus I see the world anew through the eyes of a warrior. The trials of battle have erased my past. I have died and been reborn, yet my mission carries me ever onward. I've spoken to the dying victims of hideous tortures. I have taken fierce blows, as I've fought the likes of the Brain Spate and the Mammoth Gulp. You can see the scars. This one, across my chest, the sting of a dying Spine Quiver.

Yet my journeys have given me satisfactions. I have won and lost fortunes at the spin of the wheel. I robbed the dealer when I saw the ace slide out from his dirty sleeve. I've consorted with lords and wizards, jesters and midgets.

In the torchlight of a dungeon I cut the throat of a Shadow Fiend. During a whole season I sailed the terrifying seas to faraway lands. It was like a world I'd never seen. I robbed and plundered decrepit towns just to stay alive.

And yet, I shall remember always the last words of my Princess: "I could have chosen anyone, but I choose you."

I must not fail her.



Shadow Fiend

Getting Started

To load *The Legend of Blacksilver*, follow the steps for your system.



When playing *The Legend of Blacksilver* on any system, use the Epyx 500XJ joystick for precise, instant control. The 500XJ is the only joystick that actually fits your hand and puts the fire button right at your trigger finger.

Commodore 64/128

1. Set up your system. If you're going to use a joystick, plug one into port 2.
2. Remove all disks from the disk drives and turn on the system. For Commodore 128, hold down the **C₆** key when you turn on the system to set it to C64 mode.
3. Insert *The Legend of Blacksilver* disk into the drive, type **LOAD "*",8,1** and press **Return**. (Or, if you have an Epyx Fast Load cartridge, hold down the **C₆** key and press **Run/Stop**.) The program loads and the title screen appears.

Apple II Series

1. Set up your system. If you're going to use a joystick, plug one in.
2. Insert *The Legend of Blacksilver* disk into the disk drive, label side up, and turn on your system.
3. Press the fire button to start the game.

IBM PC and Compatibles

1. Set up your system.
2. To load *The Legend of Blacksilver*, follow the instructions on the command card included with this manual.

Beginning the Game



After *The Legend of Blacksilver* loads and the title screen appears, you'll see a menu of options. Select an option with the joystick or by pressing the first letter of your choice (for instance, press S to Start a New Game). Here's what each option means:

Start a New Game (S) Select this option to begin a new adventure. You'll be instructed how to create a new character and put him on your character disk. Then you'll start the game from the beginning. Your character disk can store up to eight separate games in progress. Each time you stop the game (with the End command), your character will be saved to this disk. The first time you start a new game, a character disk is automatically made for you. Just be sure to have a blank disk handy.

Continue an Old Game (C) Use this option to restart an existing character. You will be prompted to insert your character disk and to select the character you want to restart. Your character will be brought back to life exactly where he last ended the game.

Erase a Character (E) Some old characters do nothing but hang around and boast of past exploits. This command lets you silence their bragging.

Demonstrate Game (D) This command runs a preview of the game. The preview will continue until you press a key.

Brief Instructions (B) This option is designed especially for those who like to start a game first and read about it later. If this is your style, go for it. Just remember that you can always return to the manual.

Game Control

The Commodore and Apple versions of *The Legend of Blacksilver* can be played with either a keyboard or joystick. The IBM version can be played with either a keyboard or mouse. On all versions, you can switch back and forth at almost any time. Since commands are always shown on screen, there is no need to memorize command lists.

Whether you use keyboard, joystick, or mouse, there are three main things you'll need to know:

- How to move your character.
- How to select commands from the main command list.
- How to select commands from additional menus.

Keyboard Control

The keys used for direction are grouped together on the keyboard. Use them for two purposes: to move your character and to select a direction in which to move. In the dungeons and archives, you can move forward or backward or turn in place. In all other locations, you can move up, down, right, or left.

Apple and IBM Use the Arrow keys as direction keys.

Commodore 64/128 Use the following keys as direction keys.

- @ — forward (or up)
- : ; — turn/move left or right
- / — backwards (or down)

On the Commodore, you can press **Run/Stop** to pause the action in most of the game's locales. (When a game is paused, the screen's border turns white.) Press **Run/Stop** again to resume gameplay.

The command list is shown on the left side of the screen. To select a command, press the first letter of the command's name. For instance, to rob someone press **R**.

Many times during the game you will see an additional menu of options. To choose an option from the menu, use the direction keys to highlight your choice, then press **Return**. Or, press the first letter of your selection. (If the choices are numbered, press a number.)

Joystick Control

You can use a joystick with the Apple and Commodore versions of *The Legend of Blacksilver*. In the dungeons and archives, use the joystick to walk forward, backward, or to turn in place. In all other locations, use the joystick to move up, down, right, and left.

To enter a command on the Commodore, hold down the joystick button until the command list turns yellow. Release the button, use the joystick to highlight the desired command, then tap the button. Once selected, a command stays highlighted. If you want to repeat the last command, just tap the button.

On the Apple, press joystick button #0 to enter a command that is already highlighted. To enter a new command, press button #1, use the joystick to highlight the desired command, then press button #0.

For additional menus, use the joystick to highlight the desired selection, then press the joystick button (Commodore) or joystick button #0 (Apple).

Command List

The command list is displayed on the left side of the screen. Different commands are available in different places, so you'll want to study the list when you change locales. To choose a command, select it with your joystick or press the first letter of the command's name.

Armor Put on your armor. Armor does you no good unless it's worn.

Climb Climb up or down holes in the dungeons, and occasionally elsewhere.

Disembark Trim your sails, drop anchor, and leave your sailing vessel. The boat *may* be there when you return.

End Save your current position in the game to the character disk. It's a good idea to end a game from time to time. This command is only available while you're roaming outside or while you're in a dungeon.

Fight Attack a target with the weapon in your hands. In some places, you will be asked to specify the direction of your attack. Use the direction keys to do so.

Gamespeed Affects how long messages are left on the screen. The gamespeed starts at 4 (fairly slow). If you're getting bored then by all means speed it up. This command is also a handy way to pause the game, since the action won't continue until you've selected a new speed.

Inventory Lists your current attributes, weapons, armor, possessions, and magic. The weapon and armor in use are highlighted. Your magic skill level is also listed for all magic spells you possess.

Leave Exit a place without having to walk out. A timesaver.

Magic Try to cast one of your magic spells.

Open Open a closed item which is unlocked (such as an unlocked chest or door).

Pass Do nothing for a turn. This command may sometimes be cleverly used to get in the first blow in a battle with a guard.

Rob Steal whatever is within reach.

Speak Talk to whomever is listening. Use this command any time you have something to say. For instance, you could use this command if you have a secret password you wish to reveal.

Take Pick up an item that is within reach.

Use Hold one of the items that you are carrying and use it. This command applies to all possessions except weapons, armor, magic, and archive gems (all of which function in other ways).

Weapon Place one of your weapons in hand, ready for use.

Xamine Examine your surroundings for useful information. This command reveals the presence of nearby traps along your line of sight in the dungeons.

Playing the Game



After you start the game you'll find yourself in the countryside of Thalen. Within sight are several different types of terrain. Some make for easier travel than others, and some may seem completely impassable. To get a better idea of the types of terrains and their effects on travel, use the Xamine command.

Included with *The Legend of Blacksilver* is a map of Thalen, the only continent now on the planet Bantross, and Maelbane, an evil land from the past. These maps, while reasonably accurate, are not perfect by today's exacting standards. Bantross mapmakers sometimes use guesswork and intuition when they lack solid knowledge.

Place-name stickers are supplied with the maps. Use the sticker to mark the locations on the maps of places you discover in your travels. Once in place, stickers can be moved to new positions if you change your mind.

Outdoor Encounters

There are 64 different kinds of outside creatures, many of whom stay exclusively in one particular type of terrain. Creatures who can survive in harsh environments (such as deserts or mountains) are stronger than those from less hostile places. On the other hand, stronger creatures tend to collect more gold. It's important to plan your travels accordingly.

There are two basic types of creatures. Monsters are always unfriendly and not too smart. They're seldom found outside their standard habitat. Humanoids can be either friend or foe, and usually travel over many different terrains.

When you encounter a creature outside, a variety of things can happen. Pay careful attention to the messages you read. You'll be able to detect whether the creature is approaching you or whether you're overtaking it. Sometimes you can tell how many or what kind of creatures there are before they are within range.



Snap Jaw

About half the time, you'll see the creature before it sees you. In that case you'll have the following options:

Approach Move boldly toward the creature, not bothering with stealth. This option maximizes your chance of encountering the creature. However, some otherwise friendly creatures may assume your intentions are hostile.

Stalk Sneak up on your potential adversary. This option gives you a very good chance to get in the first blow, but it's not a good way to win friends. Stalking also slows you down, thereby increasing a creature's likelihood of eluding you.

Wait Stand still and openly wait for the creature to approach. Waiting is a good way to demonstrate your peaceful intentions, but you'll miss a lot of creatures who go the other way.

Flee Run away. This is a good choice for both cowards and smart adventurers. Some creatures are just too tough to fight. Besides, if the creature catches you anyway, it'll understand your lack of hostility. Just don't expect to get in the first blow.

Once a creature is within range, you have several choices. If you choose to fight, you'll have the following options:

Battle Fight the creature with a normal cautious attack.

Charge Attack the creature with reckless abandon, paying minimal attention to your own defense. You'll have a good chance of hitting your foe hard, but will leave yourself more vulnerable to counter-attack.

Magic Cast a spell (if your character has magic).

Other Lets you select a different option from the command list.

If you speak to a creature, you'll be given three options: threaten, barter, or surrender. Bartering can be a good way to gain valuable weapons, armor, food, or potions. Be advised that traveling creatures don't belong to the Better Business Bureau, and may exaggerate the quality of their fine products.

The Legend of Blacksilver carries out your speaking commands in a reasonable way. For instance, threatening an enemy warrior means you shout something like "Begone, pond scum, or I shall slay you where you stand." On the other hand, threatening a non-intelligent beast means you do something like run toward it shouting, with arms waving.

Towns

Towns offer the opportunity to stop for a breather. There are 16 towns on Bantross. They are depicted by a bird's-eye view, with trees, fences, pathways, and rooftops easily visible. Buildings can be entered by pathways or entry steps.

Each town has its own distinct flavor, with different shops, gambling parlors, banks, and more. The price of identical goods can vary greatly from town to town, so the prudent adventurer is advised to shop around and compare prices.

Weapons Shop Buys and sells weapons at a fixed price. Prices vary by weapon type, quality, and town. Good-quality weapons work better and are less likely to be broken in use.

Armor Shop Provides the savvy shopper with the latest in personal protection. As your character progresses, increasingly better armor is available.

Bank Offers interest-bearing savings accounts and a variety of personal loans. You may notice that a few of the larger banks have guarded back rooms.

Grocery Offers travelers a way to stock up for long journeys.

Broker Might be willing to purchase your used armor and weaponry. These merchants are clever bargainers and are usually willing to negotiate prices with customers. A word of advice: the broker's opening price is usually ridiculously low. Make a high counter-offer.

Marina Sometimes available to sell rafts. You'll be unable to buy a raft until your character is sufficiently advanced to handle it. It's easiest to obtain a raft for inland lakes, although these aren't available at the start of the game.

Magic Shops Sell all sorts of useful spells. A beginning player cannot buy advanced spells. There are two types of magic shops, each selling different spells.

Production Shops May offer you the opportunity to earn gold by working for a day or by running errands. You might bake bread, sew clothing, or make munitions, to name a few.

Casinos Lure even the stingiest adventurers, for they can be a great way to win gold. The Dragon Wheel can increase your money 50-fold on a single spin. Just be sure not to bet too much on any one spin; it's wise to expect some droughts between wins. On Thalen, Black Jack is a time-honored way to increase your holdings. Heigh-Loagh is also a great way to win money, provided you know the proper "half-way" point between deuce and ace.

Temples and Archives

Walk reverently in the temples, for they are holy shrines to the Gods of Bantross. Built and maintained by the Brotherhood, temples offer much more than rest to the weary explorer. Some temple dwellers provide things of immediate benefit. Others will help only if you discover their secret motivation.

Residing in each temple is a Gamemaster. Each Gamemaster runs a different "arcade-style" game of skill. You'll find Hard-Rock Melee, Trap Shoot, and Trist. Playing these games improves your character's attributes. It'll probably take you a couple of tries to get the hang of things. But once you do, it'll really help your combat abilities. A bit of advice: return from time to time to brush up on your skills.

Additionally, the Brotherhood maintains its archives beneath some of the temples. Once you discover how to enter the archives, you'll find vast underground corridors leading to a variety of special exhibits. These exhibits can be opened, although special gems are usually needed to activate a display. Such displays provide the adventurer with useful items, information, and even gateways to far lands. Visitors are cautioned to spend their gems carefully. Some displays can be visited only once. Others can be used indefinitely for a single gem.

Castles

IThese strongholds go by different names, but all contain vast wealth, useful items, and some very memorable occupants. Patrolled by large numbers of burly guards, evil castles are no place for the weak or poorly-equipped adventurer.

King Durek's Castle The beginning player should probably seek out the castle to meet Prince Arovyn and the Wizard Seravol, as well as the other castle occupants. If you aren't getting anywhere, the guards may be of help. It'll be to your advantage to consult with both Seravol and the Prince throughout your adventure. They are often a good source of important information and pertinent advice.

Other Castles These are hostile and forbidding multi-level places. You will find great wealth, but the cost of taking it is high. Be sure to talk with each castle occupant — they will be essential to your mission. Some will ask questions. Think well upon your answers. Far into your adventures, you will enter the Labyrinth. This magical fortress is confusingly complex, a series of chambers interconnected by magical transports. This structure was created by Minon's evil followers at the time of the Mage Wars. Its guards are not human, but enchanted servants of a long-dead lord. Be advised to notice the effect of the "floor switches" upon the guards. You can learn how to activate and de-activate these deadly magical foes.

Dungeons

Beneath the surface of Bantross lie the dungeons, which vary from four to 12 levels deep. Dungeons are dangerous places, shown in three-dimensional perspective. Many date back to a time when sorcery ruled and sorcerers guarded their treasures in deep tunnels, hewn from the bedrock by Blacksilver. You can find cases, urns, chests of gold, food, armor, and special items.

Danger abounds beneath the surface; the deeper you go the more damage you tend to receive. Part of the danger comes from the trip bars, poison darts, holes, and gas vents. A greater camouflaged danger are the monsters. The types of monsters you encounter will change as you journey downward, becoming progressively stronger and more devious. Besides costing you hit points, many of the creatures employ their own unique brand of attack. Some can psychically drain your attributes; others can damage your weapons and armor; still others will steal. You may even find yourself temporarily blinded. It's wise to learn which creatures to treat with special care.



You'll always be told when a creature has affected you in one of these ways.

You'll have to decide how you wish to explore the dungeons. Some people simply wander around until they find a floor hole leading up or down. Others employ a simple strategy, such as always keeping their right hand on the wall. Still others end up mapping the entire dungeon. Your choice will depend on how difficult you find the dungeons. Most levels are relatively straightforward, with no special tricks or surprises. A few levels, however, are so complex that to go deeper may require you to go up and then down again. Even if you don't ordinarily map, you might consider doing so for any level that seems unduly complex.

In the dungeons and archives, turning left or right pivots you in place. The point you pivot around is slightly ahead of you, just within your field of view.

Assassin



Your Character

Inventory



our equipment is divided into three basic categories: armor, weapons, and items. Unless you are wearing it or using it, all your equipment is stored in your travel pack. To remove armor from the travel pack and put it on, use the Armor command. Similarly, the Weapon command places a weapon in your character's hand. Anything that isn't a weapon or a piece of armor is considered an "item." The Use command lets you activate any item in your travel pack (except gems, which work only in the archives).

Your inventory also lists all magic spells in your possession. You will see how many of each spell your character has plus his skill level for each spell.

Attributes



Five characteristics determine the physical and mental powers of your character. Each starts at a level of 15, and can be increased through training, by completion of special quests, and with magical objects found in your explorations. Some creatures and situations are capable of reducing these attributes.

Strength Determines the effectiveness of your blows in combat. The greater your strength, the harder you hit your opponent.

Endurance Affects your ability to withstand blows during combat. If your endurance is high, you receive less damage when your opponent lands a blow.

Dexterity Determines how frequently your blows land and how often you dodge blows from an attacker.

Intelligence Affects the success rate of your magic spells. A player with low intelligence can expect many more spells to fizzle.

Charisma Influences how successful you are in dealing with merchants and other characters. This affects the price you pay for goods.

Level



There are various ranks of adventurer on Bantross. You start *The Legend of Blacksilver* as a serf, the lowest possible level. Most of your level increases will come when the Wizard Seravol deems you worthy of an increase. As your level goes up, the maximum number of hit points you can achieve increases.

Hit Points

 Hit points reflect the amount of damage you can receive before you are killed. When your hit points fall to zero, you die. If this happens, don't panic. The Wizard Seravol may be able to resurrect you, thanks to a very small speck of Blacksilver in his possession. In fact, due to Seravol's unique abilities a strange thing happens. Immediately after resurrection your character has 50 percent more hit points than its "maximum." It is unclear, however, how many times Seravol can resurrect a character.



Some players, upon dying, choose to turn off the computer and restart their character from the spot it was last saved. Please be careful if you do this! Sometimes that old character is older than you think. You start him up, but forget that he hasn't done various things yet. This is a way to get "stuck" in the game.

Food



Food is necessary for travel outside and in the dungeons. Your current supply of food is usually listed on the screen. Make sure not to run out, or you'll die. If you are running low, try to travel on terrains that use a relatively small amount of food.

Food can be purchased in all towns and from many traveling creatures. It is also often possible to skin and eat creatures you kill while traveling. This is usually a good idea, although there is a small chance you'll get sick. A few creatures, however, routinely carry disease and should be avoided.

Gold



Gold is the currency of choice on Bantross, useful for buying all manner of goods. You'll need lots of gold to play *The Legend of Blacksilver*. There are many ways to get it — some common ones include: killing monsters, robbing merchants, raiding castles and dungeons, working in towns, and gambling. Use some ingenuity, for there are also several other ways to collect gold.

Magic Spells



our character can possess nine different types of magic spells. Some of these may be purchased and used right away. Others are considered advanced, and require your character to be qualified before he can use them. Towns won't sell advanced spells to unqualified adventurers:

A character's overall effectiveness with a magic spell is affected by three basic things:

- Where the character is, and who the character is attempting to affect with his spell. For instance, offensive spells work better in the dungeon than in the Labyrinth. They also work better against an Assassin than they do against Spike.
- The character's intelligence. This attribute has a direct effect on how often a spell fails. Characters of lesser intelligence often botch a spell, causing it to fail entirely.
- The character's skill with the spell you are using. Your character has a specific skill level for every type of magic spell he owns. When you invoke a spell, assuming it isn't botched, this skill level affects how effective the spell will be. Skill levels for individual spells usually start out at around 20 to 30, and reach a maximum of about 100. Stay alert to learn how to increase your skill level.

Simple Magic Spells

Tongue of Flame An offensive spell which hits a single target for hit point damage. A beginning character has a skill level of 30.

Glow Tip Causes any weapon your character is holding to hit harder. Glow Tip lasts for 30 to 60 weapon uses, and remains in effect even if your character changes weapons. You will be notified when the spell wears off. Skill level starts at 30. A higher skill level increases the amount by which a weapon is enhanced.

Armor Enchant Improves the effectiveness of your character's armor for 30 to 60 hits. You will be notified when this spell wears off. Skill level starts at 30.

Light Spell Illuminates your way in the dungeons. Skill level starts at 50. The higher your character's skill level, the less chance that your light will be blown out.



Along the way you may find a dungeon with such strong winds that even a skill level of 100 won't prevent blow-out. If this happens, seek another answer.

Teleport Spell Used only in dungeons. It transports your character to another location on the same dungeon level. It is useful primarily to avoid serious attack or to possibly find another portion of the dungeon. This spell, by its nature, is taxing to your character, inflicting a loss in hit points for every use. The higher the skill level, the less the hit point loss. Skill level starts at 50.

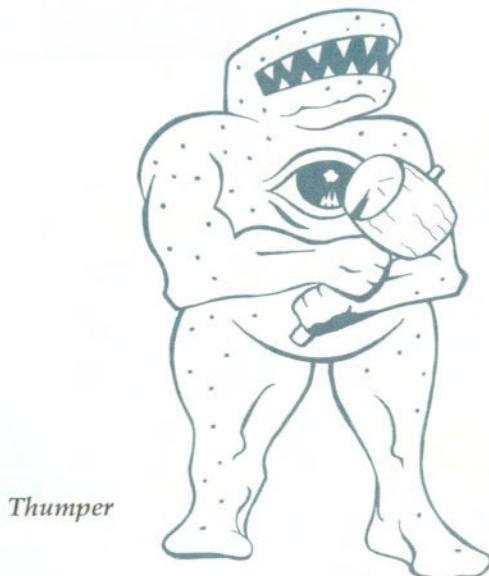
Advanced Magic Spells

Lightning Bolt An offensive weapon that strikes a single target for hit point damage. It is significantly more effective than Tongue of Flame. Beginning skill level is 30, with greater skill levels causing greater damage to the foe.

Annihilate Works only in dungeons, destroying all nearby monsters. This is a very reliable (but expensive) spell, with a skill level starting at 70. The higher the skill level, the greater the destructive range.

Nimble Step Lightens your character's footsteps so he doesn't set off dungeon traps as easily. A beginner starts at skill level 20, avoiding several, but not all, traps. Once your character is quite skilled, use of Nimble Step can drastically lessen the amount of time spent Xamining. This means you'll travel more quickly and be caught by fewer monsters.

Psychic Protect Guards your character against attribute draining attacks from dungeon monsters. The better your character's skill level, the better the spell protects you. Skill level starts at 30.



Tales and History of Bantross



I am Seravol, Castle Wizard and advisor to King Durek, ruler of all Thalen. I have seen much during my long life, and learned more than I have seen. During its many years, Thalen has felt the calm of peace and the rage of conquest. Both the mighty and the meek have directed its course.

In these pages, I chronicle the history of our beloved planet Bantross. Pay heed to my tales, for the future doth itself repeat.

The Course of Time

Year 417	The Sorcerer Minon Is Banished to the Island of Maelbane
Year 421	The Discovery of Blacksilver
Year 425	The Lands of Maelbane Begin Rising
Year 487	The Demons of Maelbane Conquer Thalen
Year 561	The Black War of the Maelbane Sorcerers Begins
Year 562	The Lands of Maelbane Sink into the Sea
Year 563	Life Is Peaceful on Thalen
Year 563	Taragas Reopens His Mines
Year 577	The Coronation of King Durek
Year 584	Taragas Finds Blacksilver
Year 585	King Durek Is Kidnapped
Year 589	The Present

The Tale of Maelbane (417—562)

Thalen is the only real continent on our planet Bantross. The rest is the sea, a vast blueness dotted from time to time with bits of land. Few of these islands are bigger than one travel day, east to west or north to south.

We often forget, but our land of Thalen was not always alone. Less than two centuries ago, a tiny island named Maelbane rose to prominence. Yet this was no bedtime story of "ashes to glory." For Maelbane was evil incarnate! And all who opposed her perished.

Yet, I get ahead of myself. It all began when Thalen was supreme and Maelbane was just a small sleepy island. There was little to distinguish it from any of the other islands dotting the seascape. Just a few miners, eking out a livelihood from what copper and iron they could find.

There were no scholars to chronicle Maelbane's early years. However, there is much to learn from the writings of the common folk who lived there, starting with a simple lad named Karfis . . .

Letters of Karfis

Lunos 12th, 417

Dear Dad,

After sailing for days on end, we finally got to Maelbane. The mines were huge, bored straight into the mountainside. It's keeping me busy like you said. There's work for fifty hardy menfolk here in Master Bishop's mines. The Master says that mining's tough here, but that nowhere else is there such pure copper and iron. He's a hard boss, Dad, but he's fair. We get twice the food for good days, "Gotta keep me boys strong 'n fit 'n keep 'em happy," he says, "So's they drag up the ore 'n make me happy!"

Most of the other fellows here are decent. One's kinda strange, though. Name of Minon. He just came on the last boat. Some of the boys say he was wrapped in chains. They say he was banished from the mainland, but I think they was just talkin. Keeps to himself, though. He's got funny eyes, Dad. All cold 'n sharp-like. I don't think I want to cross him.

Your boy,
Karfis

Kantril 9th, 421

Dear Dad,

Something strange happened last month. You know that quiet guy I've told you about - Minon. Him and me was working a shaft by ourselves. We wasn't finding much, just granite 'n quartz 'n other pretty useless rocks. Then I saw him pick up this shiny black rock. I told him to toss it down, it wasn't anything. But he just looked around and stuffed it into his cape.

You shoulda seen him, Dad. Minon was laughing with that strange cackle of his, and his eyes was glowing. It was spooky. I thought about telling Master Bishop, but what could I have said, "Minon found a rock?"

Still your boy,
Karfis

Morc 15th, 422

Dear Dad,

Boy, it just gets worse 'n worse. Master Bishop went off hunting two months ago and never came back. Minon is running the mines now.

We don't mine copper and iron anymore. We're lookin for that shiny black rock I told you 'bout awhile back. We ask him why he wants it. "You'll know soon enough," is all he tells us. We call the stuff "Blacksilver." Seems as good a name as any.

The new guys who came over from Thalen are a funny bunch. Big fat ones all wrapped in capes - I don't see a one of them that will be able to put in a day's digging without keeling over! But Minon doesn't have'em dig a lick. They just huddle in his tent, day after day. I wonder what they do in there.

Your son,
Karfis

Apparently Thalen was too lenient with its criminals. If Minon had been executed for his crimes instead of merely banished, none of what was to follow would have happened. Of course, who could have suspected that Minon would find a huge deposit of Blacksilver, the source of all magic on Bantross?

Minon wasted little time. After finding Blacksilver, he set out to expand his power. We read Minon's thoughts from his own diary . . .

Excerpts from Minon's Diary

Banos 34th, 421

The fools! I laugh in their very faces, yet still they do not know. I found it today. Blacksilver! Precious, sweet, valuable Blacksilver. The boy Karfis was with me, but he is too dense to worry about. I'm sure there's more Blacksilver here. It will fuel my revenge! It will burn my enemies!

Verthy 14th, 422

No one even suspects! I shot Master Bishop with his own bow and buried the body deep. Then I returned to seize my rightful place of power. The miners now do my bidding.

My followers will arrive by the summer solstice. I sent for them in secret. Then the Lords of Thalen will be sorry—those who cast me onto this wretched island. I will live to spit on their graves. My dreams show me the way.

Oeliz 21st, 425

It has started. My fellow Sorcerers have joined me in the quest. The island itself is rising. One day, the maps will show Maelbane in the center, as the mightiest land of Bantross. My power still grows. I could sink Thalen if I wanted. I won't, though. I will rule it instead. I will crush the skulls of those who banished me.

The Conquest of Thalen



las, before many years had passed, the wretched Minon had the power to make good on his vulgar promises. The rising lands of Maelbane became a playground for Minon and his sorcerer apprentices. They built deserts from the swamps and mountains from the sea. Meanwhile, Minon began to build a mighty army. Though many soldiers were actually the unholy creations of the Wizard's magical laboratories, Maelbane also attracted the worst elements of Thalen. In this way, the armies of Maelbane recruited the dregs of Thalen: criminals, felons, thieves, and all manner of Thalen's worst. The most ambitious of these rose to the top, commanding their fellows through torture and ruthless discipline. Those with lesser goals soon came to regret their tenure, as the months of arduous training took their toll.

The sorcerers' invasion of Thalen began in 486. Minon remained on the new continent of Maelbane to direct the attack, while legions of troops sailed toward Thalen. That noble island was no match for these trained warriors of death.

The wartime account of General Vikus, Minon's second sorcerer in command, well describes the carnage that was to come . . .

Battle Notes from the Shade General Vikus

Verthy 7th, 486

My Lord Minon:

As you have ordered, the Armada waits just outside the sight of Thalen's western coast. The men are eager to draw first blood in this campaign, and live for the moment we can engage the enemy and achieve the victory that is your due.

There was a slight disciplinary problem early in the voyage. It seems Dolkar, one of my lieutenants, had secreted a gholis stone onto our ship with the intent of using it on me. Apparently he was learned enough to recall the stories about my former life, and death, and thought to use his little trinket to send me back where you found me. Unfortunately for him, he could not keep his plans to himself and an informant named Kalin delivered this information to me on the dock as we prepared to leave.

Of course young Kalin's wretched carcass was soon in the belly of the sharks. For his splendid ambition, the much subdued Dolkar was promoted to first lieutenant, after his wagging tongue was shortened a bit. I do believe the boy has the makings to become a General some day.

Our spies are in place, and report that the enemy is far less prepared than we anticipated. It almost saddens me, my Lord, that this fight will be a short one against these soft farmers and merchants. I had sorely hoped for a worthy challenge.

Your servant,
General Vikus

Esodis 19th, 487

My Lord:

The fighting has been routine of late, no match for the glory of the burning of Ironwood, or the seige of Ridgeport. Lord Rehisol is dead. I watched him die, along with six score of his pitiful soldiers. We had beaten his main force back and isolated Rehisol in a large field of hay, along with his quaking warriors. He offered surrender, much to his disgrace, and it was a great pleasure to set fire to the dry grasses. We had target practice on the fools as they fled their pyre. It is sad to see that these modern leaders have so little appreciation for battlefield tactics. Can there be any doubt who is most fit to rule this land?

We have yet to locate King Sreylik, although our interrogators have discovered he is leading the resistance. We hear the King awaits us at Eagle Temple, with a ragged band of knights, farmers, empaths and merchants. No doubt too little and too late. I hope to slay him personally, if only to drive home the point that Power is more precious than Peace. His last-ditch defense cannot hold out long.

Yours in victory,
General Vikus

Banos 13th, 487

My Lord:

Thalen is yours, Lord Minon.

The last pockets of resistance are extinguished, and our war-carts crush the grass in the courtyard of Sreylik's castle. The former King's rag-tag forces fought well, but our numbers were far greater. My men had their amusement, as we ran them from spearpoint to spearpoint. Sadly, our fun came to an end.

Finally, my troops led the King to me in chains. I'll say this for the man; he did not respond to our taunts and he would not flinch. Sreylik died as he was born — naked and without shame. I swung the axe myself.

Yours in conquest,
Vikus

From 487 and 561, Maelbane ruled the lands of Thalen. Minon's lieutenants governed without mercy, and from his stronghold on Maelbane, the evil sorcerer ground Thalen into submission. The blood flowed freely.

The greed and debauchery of Minon's followers was second to none, but without a common foe, their aggression turned inward. Minor squabbles between the Wizards turned into major skirmishes, as each wizard sought to gain power over the others. Although Minon was clearly the strongest wizard, his power alone was not enough to quell the restless rabble. Alliances formed and then shifted. Partnerships were made and then broken. As heavy fighting broke out between the sorcerers, the Blacksilver was diluted.

You see, each time a spell is cast, a minute bit of Blacksilver is lost to the winds. It's not enough to notice with a single spell. But, as the battles raged and the sorcerers cast mighty spells over each other, their Blacksilver dwindled. This was, praise the gods, the beginning of their end.

As the Blacksilver diminished, the lands of Maelbane were slowly reclaimed by the ocean. You see, Maelbane was a land created solely by magic; wrenched unnaturally from the depths of the ocean floor. Without magic to sustain it, Maelbane succumbed to the seas.

The following excerpts are from the journal of Archmage Talmis. They provide a glimpse of the greed for power that brought the sorcerer's rule to an end.

From the Journal of Archmage Talmis

Morc 2nd, 562

My time is nigh! The Age of Talmis is about to begin. Minon retreats under his Deathbane shield and the others fight amongst themselves with abandon. Their petty spells fly from fortress to fortress, depleting their supplies of the precious Blacksilver. The sorcerers' squabbles make my job even easier.

Soon they will grovel at my feet. They will lick the dirt on which I walk. I shall rule with wisdom, crushing all who stand in my way. The calling for power rings out in my noble blood. When I think of that doddering Minon sitting on the black throne, the throne I shall soon hold, it makes me vomit.

Omlis 18th, 562

My conquest begins! I cast the death cloud today, winging it toward my foes. The sky was black with carrion hawks, viper bats, and giant sting-kill insects. Sweet victory will be mine.

Omlis 21st, 562

My deathcloud returned today, diving at my own fortress. Could I have underestimated their power! NO! Perhaps some fluke in the atmospheres. I shall redouble my attacks. I have plenty of Blacksilver left.

Omlis 31st, 562

Curse the Black Gods of Bantross! My Blacksilver is disappearing! Attacks from Blynder and Derimi required a tremendous defense, especially against the army of Ice Mongers sent against me. My counter-attacks were the greatest summoning I have ever attempted, and I am sure my foes were annihilated by the army of dead enchanters who marched against them.

I noticed today that Mouth Valley is filling with water. Is this some foul attack from those lesser sorcerers, or is Maelbane sinking? Surely the Blacksilver cannot be so far gone. No matter. I cannot let such concerns distract me from my next task, when I summon the whole of my powers to attack Minon.

Verthy 5th, 562

My enemies have rallied to attack me. Somehow, they are not dead. My Blacksilver is nearly gone and the waves of the sea now lap against my castle. The fools! If I go, we shall all go! Let Maelbane sink to the bottom of the stinking seas!

They won't find me in the muck, for I shall live to fight again. I have enough Blacksilver for my final and greatest spell. Thus, when I return to this land, all will be as it was: the birds, the animals and all who live here. All will be untouched by time. All shall be mine!

Peace Returns to Thalen (562—589)

With the destruction of Maelbane, the people of Thalen rejoiced. Trumpets blared, shops opened, and citizens one and all were glad. Yet, beaten people do not heal overnight. Over the years, however, the land came to peace. Never again would Thalen be in jeopardy.

Or so we thought. A man named Taragas had different ideas. You see, Baron Taragas had always been something of a recluse. He worked his mountain mines, kept mostly to himself, and turned down all social offers from the Baronies around him. Most thought him merely a little odd. Harmless.

We know now that Taragas's efforts were all in the name of Blacksilver. For over two decades, he searched. We know little of that time, only the reports of the unfortunate men who labored for him.

A Miner's Letters

Esodis 11th, 582
My Darling Winnis,

Well, sister, it ain't that bad unless the Baron's nearby. Then, you'd best dig like a crazy man. I've been here two years and have the scars to prove it. Some of the men say he's kept them here nearly twenty. He can be a mean one, that Baron Taragas.

We ain't found but a speck of gold and silver. Everyone knows the mine's been run out. But ask the Baron what he's lookin for and he gets this funny look and says, "You just do your job and dig. I'll know it when I find it." You should see his eyes.

Well, send Renol my love. I can't be here forever.

Your loving brother,
Nerham

Banos 25th, 584
My Darling Winnis,

Well Winnis, he found it, and I'll be a Bantog's nephew if I can tell you what "it" is! Jet-black bedrock is all the stuff looks like to me. You shoulda seen the Baron when he saw it. Jumping up and down and hugging himself. It was scary. Then he gets all serious. Taking his precious little lump in hand, he tells us all that this is the ore he wants. Taragas tells the guards, "Double the rations for the shift that brings out the most, half the rations for the shift that brings out the least." Oh, he's a kind one, our Baron.

Now I hear him cackling and chuckling when he walks by, I do. Next I suppose he'll have us digging for starlight so he can fill his bedlamp. I'm getting too old for this, sister.

Your loving brother,
Nerham

The Baron's Rise from Obscurity



In the few short years following Taragas's discovery of Blacksilver, the corrupt Baron's power grew and grew. He tripled the workforce in the mines, no doubt to gain enough Blacksilver to cast his spells.

He worked in secrecy, keeping the Blacksilver to himself. Some suspected that Taragas labored for evil, yet no one really knew. The enemies of Taragas increased in number. His allies dwindled; yet, Taragas grew ever stronger. We read of these years from the accounts of worthy Prince Arovyn.

From the Diary of Prince Arovyn, son of King Durek

Omlis 16th, 585

The news today was ominous. One of Taragas's serfs arrived at the castle, bloody and bandaged and covered in dirt. "Your Majesty, I escaped the mines a fortnight ago," he stammered. "Please listen to a laborer's story."

"We have been locked in the Baron's mines for nigh on six months, whipped and starving. Yet, Taragas does not look for gold or silver. Aye, there's plenty of that lying all around. No, the only men who eat are those who find the black stone. Many have died."

"What kind of black stone?" the Wizard Seravol thundered. The wizard looked angry, and perhaps a bit surprised. I've never seen him like that before. The miner, trembling a bit at the old conjurer's wrath, gave Seravol a small back pebble in reply, saying "I kept it when I ran."

"I dread what this might be," Seravol said as he disappeared into his chambers.

Omlis 27th, 585

"Blacksilver," the Wizard declared, "Of that I have no doubt." He shook his grey locks sadly. "The power that once made Maelbane is here on Thalen," he said. "Our Kingdom is in deadly peril."

Father took the news like a blow. He sat in his private chambers brooding, looking constantly at a map of the province where Taragas holds sway. Slowly, he pulled himself out of the mood, and his eyes blazed with anger as he announced his decision.

We will call the knights together and march in a week. May the gods of Bantross march with us.

Verthy 2nd, 585

The earth shook this afternoon. It was as if giants were pounding the ground with great hammers. The vibrations damaged the southwest castle tower. The guard who was manning the tower was killed. What could be the cause of this tragedy? The earth has never shaken before. Let us hope the gods are not displeased with us.



Proclamation of King Durek

Verthy 4th, 585

KNIGHTS OF THALEN!

A Call to ARMS!

I, King Durek, by my power as your Sovereign Lord, call upon all Brave and Noble Knights to March with me against our Common Foe. We gather on Victory Mound in seven days.

LONG LIVE THALEN!

King Durek was a popular King. Twenty score knights rallied to his call. They set out at dawn for the fortress of Taragas. Princess Aylea writes of the results.

From the Journal of Princess Aylea

Lunos 6th, 585

They return to us now, less than a moon since they marched away with laughing boasts and lusty cheers. Gone are the boasts. Gone are the cheers. Our King has been kidnapped — held for a ransom too dear to pay.

My brave brother Arovyn stands tall and steady as he reassures the men. To them, he looks every bit the leader. To me, however, his shock is evident and he looks like a frightened boy with the entire world on his shoulders. Shortly after his return, Arovyn told me how it happened:

"We reached the fortress near dusk, and made camp just beyond the reach of the Taragas archers. The men were happy, for tomorrow the victory would unfold. Father, Sir Tyrol, Lord Omarl, and I met to plan our strategy. I was proud, for the others were master tacticians.

"When the meeting broke, we left father alone in his tent. Sentries were posted outside the camp and outside the royal tent. A small group of knights circled the fortress, making sure no one escaped in the quiet of the night. The moon was full and the sky clear. Our plans were well made.

"But when the time came to awake the King, his tent was found empty. The sentries were questioned, and the ground beneath the tent searched for signs of a tunnel, but nothing was found. I decided it must be sorcery, and led the charge against the dark fortress.

"The sun had not yet risen, so the fortress was shrouded in mist. When we broke through, the fortress was gone. There was nothing to mark the spot where it stood. We searched the surrounding lands for two days, hoping to discover the trick, but it was useless. And so we return broken, stunned, and without our King."

My brother's story did not take me by total surprise. Three days ago, a messenger came from the south. He claimed to speak for Baron Taragas saying:

"Your knights soon return with a tale of magic at its finest. Your King is missing, imprisoned where you will never find him. Soon, you shall know the full extent of my power."

Oeliz 10th, 585

Seravol told me today that my destiny has come. "Aylea," he said, "I see the scornful pity in your eyes. Do not be so harsh in judging the men returned from battle, for only a hero is worthy of this task." I must have been tired, for I snapped back, "Yes, and it is a pity that Thalen has none!" The old conjurer smiled ruefully and said, "If you believe that, my child, we are lost, for it is you who must find Thalen's next and greatest champion."

I know not what to do, for Seravol can tell me no more. Ever since his magical orb was stolen, his advice has been good but limited. He says that he's handicapped, for his power comes only by way of dream and hunch. I know not how to search for heroes.

Meanwhile my own dreams are strange and tormented. As I sleep, I ride the countryside in my dreams, searching the realm for a hero. I know not who he is.

Princess Aylea

The 3rd day of Erod, 585

If upon this parchment another should gaze, know that the final chapter is yet unwritten. I pray that I could see the future of our noble land, but it remains a storm on my horizon. Somewhere, I know, dwells a hero. Whether he will save us, I know not ...

Seravol Wizard

Seravol's Creature Compendium



've compiled this list of creatures as an aid to Thalen travelers. If you suspect that I've never personally encountered most of these creatures, you're correct. After all, I'm still alive to tell these tales.

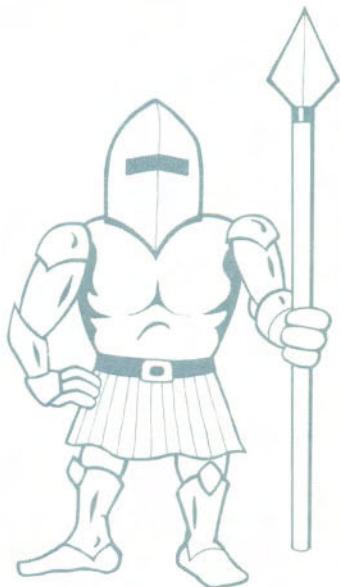
Creatures from Thalen Travelers

Enzod Warrior Under ordinary circumstances, these proud tribesmen are excellent fellows, renowned for their extreme friendliness and hospitality. The Enzod's religion, however, does require the taking of a human head just prior to certain rituals, the exact timing of which is unknown. In the days leading up to the ceremony, Enzod Warriors become fierce and dangerous until the proper head is selected and harvested. Immediately after the rites, they revert to their genial ways, often treating survivors to large quantities of their very fine home-brewed beer.

Ragyn Knight Members of this elite group were once the toast of the land. They enjoyed the hospitality of Thalen wherever they went, from the inner chambers of the highest court to the humblest serf's cottage. When Minon's threats began, it was only natural to send the Ragyn Knights against him. Therein began their decline from grace.

By popular accounts, Minon did nothing to defend himself against the Knights — they were just too cowardly to fight his armies. In reality, Minon performed one simple magical illusion. Every time a Knight was about to slay one of Minon's servants, the servant took on the shape of the Knight's wife, daughter, or lover. Some Knights faced this hideous challenge over a hundred times before breaking down from the terrible stress.

Trilp Trilps can be found throughout the whole of Thalen. Tiny and humanoid in appearance, they sport large cat-like ears. Trilps are believed to travel in a magical dimension. It is not uncommon to see a Trilp flicker into existence. Often these creatures are quite genial to the travelers they meet. Yet there are many stories of the perverse mischief caused when a "Big Earless Wonder" (as they call humans) annoys a Trilp.



Ragyn Knight

Peasant The backbone of Thalen's economy, peasants can be found throughout the land. Peasants are generally poor and unlearned, and look to the Barons for guidance and protection. They pay their tribute in turnips and potatoes. Stories of the clever peasant abound, farmers whose rustic wit and common sense find answers that elude the most educated of the ruling class. This romantic notion is easily dispelled by actually talking to a peasant. You'd be amazed at how much they have to say about fertilizer, womenfolk, and wrestling heroes, and how little about anything else.

Amazar Long before towns sprang up or castles were built, the Amazar roamed the plains of southern Thalen. Tall and golden-skinned, they loped gracefully across the fields in pursuit of game. By Amazar standards, however, to be beautiful is to be short. Now, after centuries of selective breeding, any Amazar who attains the height of three feet is an ungainly giant.

Trapper Although found most often under the canopy of Thalen's great forests, these hardy souls travel great distances — always alone. They sell their stock of pelts, carved bones, and rendered Bowel Root fat to all they meet. Trappers are masters of woods lore and have no peers when it comes to Slome skinning or Squealer calls. Thrifty by necessity, they are fond of a soap they make from Krakyl blubber. The charming fragrance of the blubber-soap guarantees the solitude these happy hunters crave.

Slome Except for the single eye set into the middle of their sloping foreheads, Slomes look like enormous hairy humans. They occasionally trade with bypassers, speaking an old Thalic dialect to hawk their wares. Slomes spend endless hours lying about, twisting grasses and vines into tight braids with their blunt powerful fingers. These beings might seem too lazy and good-natured to ever be a threat. Catch a Slome on a bad day, however, and you'll experience the Slome's weaving ability firsthand.

Creatures of the Grassland

Krakyl The large, apelike Krakyl are generally docile and shy, going about their daily routine of dredging rivers and collecting boulders with silent humility. Krakyl are intensely territorial, though, and react with an internal tide of hormones when they feel threatened. This multiplies the Krakyl's strength tenfold and completely maddens them. In this state, Krakyl swing their fists like giant mallets, seeking to obliterate any interloper from sight. They usually succeed.

Quasit Hound Tamed Quasit Hounds are valued for their excellent tracking abilities and fierce hunting instincts. Beware: they do not rely on scent to follow the trail, but use psychic powers instead. Quasit Hounds use your dreams as a beacon, closing in while you sleep. You can run but you cannot hide. Everyone must sleep — eventually.

Squeezer A mature Squeezer stands as tall as a man. Its teeth are broad triangles protruding between shiny green lips. Covered in thick scales, the Squeezer lumbers through the fields on great taloned appendages that resemble human hands. Enormously strong, the Squeezer's favorite method of combat is to grasp its prey and squeeze. A sure sign of the presence of this beast is the small balls of wadded-up adventurer that it leaves carelessly scattered about.

Tingler A larger cousin of the electric eel, this abomination generates incredible electric currents within its squat body. Long supple tentacles carry the power to its victim. Protected by a heavy tortoise-like shell, Tinglers are not easy to disable. They should be feared by anyone wearing conductive metal. If you must travel in armor, beware! Any stream, bog, or puddle could be the home of a Tingler.

Lynopod Walking upright, with food tubes waving, the Lynopod is a strange, even comical sight. From a distance, its legs and feet appear humanoid. Yet the Pod's upper body is a colorful bouquet of long, flexible, translucent tubes. The creature feeds by sliding these tubes into the burrows of field mice and other underground animals. Lunch usually obliges by walking up the food tube. Should this strategem fail, the Lynopod uses the tubes like straws, sucking its quarry from the depths of the burrow. Even seasoned travelers make the mistake of under-estimating the Lynopod. But if the creature ever gets close, it will slide its tubes down your throat to steal your last meal. Protests are useless, as new tubes quickly replace the ones you hack off. It's best to vomit and run.

Snap Fiend You will recognize the Snap Fiend by its garlands of prickers draped around gnarled stalks, and the thorny maw powerful enough to break a man in two. The Fiend is not very agile. Yet if you drop by, it will insist you stick around.

Creatures of the Forest

Brain Spate Although a sentient being, this creature bears but a passing resemblance to man. Brain Spates extend fine filaments that burrow under their victim's skin in search of nerve tissue. Once in place, the filaments transmit wave after wave of blinding agony. Soon the tortured nerves heat up and cook the surrounding muscle and fat.

Fetid Wheeze Found throughout Thalen's lush forests, the Fetid Wheeze drops in when you least expect it. It falls on prey from the tops of tall trees, crushing with its gruesome bulk. The Wheeze stores its kill in sacs within its lumpy body, feeding off gases from the putrifying flesh. To regain its perch in the treetops, the creature diverts the vapors into the loose, elastic skin of its head until it floats damply upward. The Fetid Wheeze is fairly easy to detect, provided you are upwind and have a clear nose.

Blood Puppy The Blood Puppy is lovingly harmless in appearance. Its short, shiny coat of fur, its perky ears, and its soft luminous eyes will tug at your heart. You'll be greeted like a long lost master, as the Puppy jumps up and down and licks you all over. You won't realize until too late that its adorable little tongue contains rapier-sharp ridges that part flesh without pain. You may be puzzled at your sudden weakness as you lay on the ground bleeding from a thousand cuts. Your last thoughts could be of affection for the funny little creature that remains loyally by your side, endlessly licking.

Bone Worm First encountered in the Wizard's Graveyard, Bone Worms are known for their hard, sharpened beaks and their appetite for any skeletal matter. From grubs scarcely the size of a man's thumb, they can grow to hundreds of feet in length and to the thickness of a mature oak tree. Bone Worms do not kill their prey outright, preferring instead to suck out the living bones through skillfully placed incisions. Lesser predators often follow close behind, in search of a quick and convenient meal.

Creatures of the Swampland

Bantog Bantogs are bipeds who walk erect. Though their mouth-parts allow them to speak the languages of man, their dark souls seldom permit them to speak the truth. It hardly matters. With slimy skin, crablike pincers, and semi-transparent eyelids, Bantogs seldom make many friends. Secretive and aloof, their unique body chemistry is well-suited for attack. The pale green slime that clings to their rubbery hide leaves horrible burns on human flesh. Bantogs can even spit a distilled form of this slime, caustic enough to smoulder armor. Many an adversary has been startled by their accuracy and range.

Bowel Root The Bowel Root lives and feeds near marshlands. Its thorny tentacles support a mushy body-sac, the front of which is completely taken up by a big toothy grin. Usually content to forage behind large herds of land animals, the Bowel Root has also been known to graze sleepily in the wetlands just downstream of the larger human settlements. Encountering such a creature, the adventurer is cautioned to slay it immediately or flee, for otherwise he will learn quickly how the Bowel Root got its name.

Stench Creep The Stench Creep is a large, serpentine creature who makes its burrows in gassy bogs. It is composed of yard after yard of powerful coils ending at a puckered mouth lined with sharp fangs. The Stench Creep's moist skin makes its movements nearly inaudible as it slithers through the muck. It traps its quarry with muscular coils, eventually winding its entire length around the victim. You might expect to be squeezed to death, but this beast prefers not to damage its victims. As the captive squirms in vain, the Stench Creep hooks its fangs to the prey's face. It kills with its breath. Once the Creep has belched the remains of last month's meal, most victims wish it had squeezed instead. Just three words of advice: hold your breath.

Spine Quiver A tribute to the mysteries of evolution, the Spine Quiver is Thalen's natural archer. Its soft, spherical body is thick with needle-like bony spines that are tipped with a powerful venom. Once the creature sights a threat with its single compound eye, it inflates its body and uses the pressure to fire its quills. The Spine Quiver can fire round after round, at extremely high speeds. Should the bold adventurer be unimpressed by this talent, he's advised to remember the potent toxin on each quill tip. The poison prevents the coagulation of blood, and the merest scratch is often fatal. Many an explorer has died shortly after boasting, "It didn't even touch me."



Bantog

Creatures of the Desert

Sand Sweep Backing slowly across the desert, the Sand Sweep seems a comic creature — almost ridiculous. It is nature's own broom. The Sweep's tiny forelegs constantly smooth the sand behind it, as it looks for lizards and rodents. The Sand Sweep may not seem dangerous, but you'd be wise to keep your distance if you plan to laugh at this obsessively tidy creature. Many a chuckling explorer has been immobilized by a well-placed kick, and then swept neatly under the desert sands.

Themeron Convinced by the Five Year Drought that Bantross was undergoing a radical climatic change, the brilliant Archmage Themerus devised a clever plan to save humanity. He developed a body-form that would be practical in an arid world. It was a wedding of human with dragon: a human head and trunk to allow conversation and reason, with the hindquarters and scaly tail of a dragon for efficient cooling and fluid storage.

As more people fell victim to the terrible drought, Themerus convinced hundreds of thirsty peasants to try the magical conversion. One moonless night, Themerus and his band set off in search of a dragon's den. The next night, witnesses reported seeing scores of hideous creatures undulating across the dunes, rending themselves with wicked talons and howling in incomprehensible pain. The next morning the rains came.

Mammoth Gulp This fearsome aberration sports a cavernous mouth lined with row upon row of well-used teeth. The Gulp's brain is the size of a raisin, which makes it a remarkably stupid eating machine. Mammoth Gulps, though confirmed carnivores, have been observed stalking and eventually devouring desert cacti, dirt, and even large boulders. With a digestive system built to take this type of abuse, it should be obvious that Mammoth Gulps seldom bother to "peel" any armored dinner that happens to come their way.

Creatures of the Mountains

Flume Large and sad-eyed, the Flume are distantly related to the Bantog. They share the same hyperacidic body chemistries and both have large pincers in place of hands. Flumes, however, are considerably larger than Bantogs and have developed a more "passive" defense. A skilled Flume will stand still and practically invite enemies to slash at it. A solid blow will release goots of caustic blood from the beast, quickly dissolving the attacker's weapon and armor. The Flume's best offense is a poor defense.

Wild Tench Sighted as a silhouette against the darkening sky, it is easy to mistake the Wild Tench for a common mountain goat. The difference is obvious close up. The Wild Tench's great curving horns are covered with rows of fine quills that can pierce tough hide easily. Of course, baby tenches are cute as the dickens. If you'd like to raise a litter, they'd undoubtedly be happy to have you.

Screaming Nug Tragic victims of flawed genetics, Nugs are mad from birth. It is not known how they propagate or even what they eat, for the Nug does nothing except scream. The Screaming Nug's horrible shriek resonates within the bodies of those who come too close, dissolving internal organs and disintegrating flesh. There is no evidence that Nugs disturb the corpses littering their high mountain caves, or are even aware that they destroy others with their cries of madness.

Sniffler Fat and fuzzy, the Sniffler seems like a harmless pet as it follows you through the mountains. Don't feed a Sniffler, though, or it is yours for life. Any attempt to abandon it is met by sniffles and whines as the Sniffler tirelessly dogs your footsteps. A word of warning: snifflers need to eat. Many an owner has awoken with an inexplicably missing toe, or finger, or earlobe. His pet seems saddened by the loss, but strangely eager for the next nightfall.



Screaming Nug

Creatures of the Seas

Chipper In the past, fun-loving Chippers swam out every morning with Thalen fishing boats in search of seafood. But one day, a greedy fisherman could no longer stand the competition. He approached the elderly Sorcerer Muldwich for a solution. Muldwich pondered the situation with much gravity and announced with ponderous dignity that he had the answer. The Modern Chipper is the result of his brainstorm. It no longer feeds on fish.

Rammer The Rammer uses its immense bony head as a battering ram. No boat can withstand its blows. Perhaps stupefied by their own incessant pounding, these massive fish eat their prey whole, not even bothering to chew. The seamen of Thalen long believed that the beast was a god of the sea. Thinking they could appease it with a sacrifice, sailing vessels dragged behind them a thrice blessed lamb carcass. To the Rammers, whose only keen sense is that of smell, this was like ringing a dinner bell. Drawn by the blood, these "gods" gladly accepted the offering ... as an appetizer.



Chipper

Night Howl Visitors to the coasts of Thalen are often treated to a nighttime serenade by these large-mouthed creatures. The sound starts as a low rumble, more felt than heard. Then, the tone begins to rise, becoming louder and more piercing with each passing second. At its climax, the Night Howl's song is a shrill flesh-rending scream. Some explorers have relied on earplugs. Most are no longer around.

Flemmix The Flemmix is a giant, serpentine creature found in the waters off Thalen's coast. It is an adept swimmer and diver, moving with sleek speed just beneath the ocean's surface. Although able to smash a boat to kindling with its massive weight, the Flemmix avoids nasty splinters by snatching crewmen right off the moving ship. When successful, the giant beast dives violently with its prey secured in great hinged jaws. No one is sure how deep the Flemmix is capable of going, but judging from the condition of its victims (not eaten until resurfacing), it must be quite deep indeed.

Creatures from Maelbane

These descriptions are passed down from the time of the Black Wars. Maelbane is, of course, no longer around. That's a good thing, for many of its creatures were hideous misfits. Thank god they're gone forever.

Travelers

Sylvan Trader Sylvan Traders are vital to the economy of Maelbane, carrying trade throughout the sprawling continent. As practitioners of the arcane religion of V'os N'marb, Sylvan Traders believe in the holiness of commerce. They attend to their vocation with the devotion of priests. The Traders value any good deal, seeing it as a proof of the "Spiritual balance" of the universe. Of course, to swindle one of these economic zealots is to invite his fanatical hatred. This is not wise.

Worlan Fighter Though their homes are in the mountains, these soldiers ply their grisly trade throughout Maelbane. Worlans are experts in the fine art of combat, but dislike taking risks. They are well known in the black market, providing assassinations and "animal skins" at a reasonable cost. Worlan Fighters favor a quick stiletto in the shadows to the roaring mayhem of battle, although they'll take on any foe, if the price is right.



Sylvan Trader

Spell Binder Spell Binders are the pitiful remnants of a once powerful group. Composed exclusively of adept witches and high-level sorceresses, only the Coven had sufficient power to oppose Minon and his Mages. When Mage Fystillyn caught sight of the plotting witches in his Orb of Farsight, his anger was uncontrollable. He hurled a spell of Annihilation into the globe itself, destroying the Orb, himself, and blowing the top off Morbid Mountain. The Coven was not spared, though. In that flash of sheer Mage-energy its members were withered and aged into bitter old crones of little power and much malice. Thus the ruined Spell Binders now wander the land, cursing and muttering. Some will speak with you. Others will only fight.

Hooded Monk Strictly secretive, Hooded Monks hide even the merest glimpse of their faces from all whom they meet along the roads. Devoted pilgrims to physical fitness, their severe regimen keeps them lean and wiry. Highwaymen sometimes take the Hooded Monks for simple friars to be frightened and robbed. They soon learn that the robes conceal hard, muscular bodies driven by the very wrath of god.

Bandit The Bandits of Maelbane are legendary for their callous and cruel hearts. Even the most pathetically poor traveler must give up something when confronted in some lonely, shaded place. Bandits will steal the shirt off your back or cut off your big toes if you lack the gold to satisfy their foul greed. Favoring sharp daggers and thin, needle-like rapiers, these heartless swine would rob their own grandmothers if they hadn't already picked them clean last week.

Brandyx Originally a clan of the Metalwright's Guild, the Brandyx grew weary of heavy taxation. They succeeded in establishing their own enclave on Maelbane's eastern coast. There the Brandyx created wonders from the plentiful ores and sold them at very reasonable prices to all who visited their new nation. Yet one fateful day, they awoke to find the horizon black with soldiers, outfitted with the best Brandyx armor and weaponry that money could buy. Fate intervened and a handful of Brandyx warriors and their families escaped the carnage. Once burned is twice shy, however, and they are no longer the gregarious merchants of old.

Apparition Tales of Maelbane often refer to ghostly figures encountered along winding paths. Some speculate that they are the spirits of adventurers who failed in their quest. Others believe them to be demons called up to serve the desperate Mages in the last throes of the Wars. Some Apparitions appear grotesque, such as limbless, headless corpses. Others take a more pleasant form, like a pale woman clutching a babe to her bosom. Whatever their appearances, these spirits are sometimes helpful to the living.

Creatures of the Grassland

Gervin A legacy of the corrupt sorceries of Lord Charis, the Gervin is a fiendish blend of serpent and man. Although bred to walk upright, the Gervin has thick sinewy tentacles in place of arms. While its face is almost human, its long whiplike tongue darts constantly through the air, as the Gervin wanders in search of prey. Once located, the powerful tentacles make short order of any meal. Gervins were originally produced to guard Lord Charis, but soon he too writhed in their boneless embrace.

Stilted Rike This fearsome creature looms as tall as a man on its spindly legs. Strength is not its strong suit, but that doesn't really matter. The Stilted Rike sinks its large baboon-like teeth into its prey, then violently rotates its head in a terrible tearing motion. You'll need good armor to withstand an attack. Rikes are attracted to bright colors and shiny objects, and delight in finding a chubby adventurer cheaply attired.

Stun Flower Through their vivid colors and spicy scent, Stun Flowers lure the unwary into their domain. As the potential meal approaches, it unknowingly ruptures large pods attached to the plant's root system. This releases a potent, though fragrant, toxin into the air. When inhaled, the poison causes dizziness and nausea. As the victim thrashes about, more pods are broken. This perpetuates the cycle until the thrashing stops. A Maelbane maiden who receives a cut Stun Flower and a proposal for marriage should think twice before refusing her suitor.

Incubal This unholy miscreant feeds on souls. It draws out the precious life force of its host as slowly as possible, attempting to keep the victim alive indefinitely. A general laziness and weakness of resolve mark the first stages of Incubal possession. As the parasitic wraith continues to dine, the symptoms change to overwhelming despair and anguish. The final battle between the victim (struggling to die) and the Incubal (yearning to feed) is a grim lesson to those who still believe that nothing is worse than an early death.

Carrión Crawler Not strong, not swift, not clever, Carrión Crawlers slither along the ground in search of the dead. They will feast on the corpse of any creature, often arriving in packs to ravage the remains. Their hooked talons and bony mandibles make short work of even the toughest job. Some folks claim that Crawlers sometimes grow impatient while waiting for the healthy to die.

Snitewake Illusion is the weapon of Maelbane's most deceptive creature. The Snitewake can create any image: a ragged crone, an injured priest, or a luckless beggar. Its imagination knows no bound. Snitewakes take special delight in appearing as a beautiful woman (or a handsome warrior) beckoning seductively. If you are unwary enough to rush madly into the waiting arms, you will meet the reality lurking beneath the dream: long, curving, needle-sharp horns and an insatiable appetite. If you are foolish enough to throw down your weapons and remove your armor before approaching this dream-date, your fate is even more unpleasant.

Creatures of the Scrub

Furred Clench An enormous creature, the Furred Clench is covered with long stringy hair framing a six-foot gaping mouth. It flattens itself against the sand until a likely victim approaches, and then quickly springs to full height to swallow its quarry whole. Having no teeth as such, the Clench's mouth resembles that of a turtle, with a large sharpened cutting edge all around. The Furred Clench seen from above resembles a thick plush carpet, but not the sort you'd like to wander across barefoot.

Boar Weasel One way or another, all explorers are sure to notice the deep pits scattered across the scrub. They are the lairs of the Boar Weasel. This burrowing creature camouflages its home with an elaborately woven mat of grass and wildflowers. It's really quite pretty. More than one adventurer has leaned over to pick a flower, only to die with a smile on his face.

Stencheon The Stencheon must seem a strange sight to the weary traveler, easily dismissed as a mirage or hallucination. It looks like a walking transparent jellyfish. The Stencheon isn't picky — it'll eat most anything. After snaring a meal with long suckered tentacles, powerful digestive fluids then go to work, creating a stew-like soup. Onlookers can watch this transformation through the Stencheon's transparent stomach.

Creatures of the Forest

Centigrub Reputed to be a prepubescent form of the Wind Widow, this eight foot larva slithers across the forest floor. It attacks you by spitting a flaming jelly-like material from its head stalks. Once you're thoroughly cooked, the jelly hardens into a tough, transparent chitin that seals in the "flavorful juices." The Centigrub will use its legion of furry legs to drag you, thus preserved, to its nest for storage and eventual feasting. It is not known whether the Grub bothers to reheat its meals before dining.

Blood Leech Though primitive in appearance, this large worm-like creature is a sophisticated feeding machine. The Blood Leech is a symbiotic animal. Lining the inside of the Leech's feeding canal are thousands of blood-thirsty larvae, each equipped with an army of frenzied teeth. Once the Leech establishes a firm suction hold on its prey, the larvae go to work. They drain the prey in minutes, and then give up some of the catch to nourish their Blood Leech host. All parties but one profit from this arrangement.

Shadow Puff These semi-inflatable fellows live in small pits hollowed into the base of large trees. While hunting prey, the Shadow Puff places its large, circular mouth directly under the opening of its burrow. It then blows air into a tongue-like organ which inflates into a transparent, animal-shaped bag. As sure as there is a sunrise, some over-confident warrior will stride forth to vanquish the apparently weak and ineffectual spirit. Of course, they stride directly into the spiraling rows of barbed teeth that line the passage of the Shadow Puff's gullet.

Wynsel With its large, insect-like body and its shimmering wings, the Wynsel is one of the most beautiful creatures in the Maelbane wilderness. At times the air fills with a raspy hum as these little fliers flock around, sipping sweet nectar from the wildflowers and dodging through lush trees. For the most part, they are harmless, and rarely seek out man. Except, that is, when a Wynsel has eggs to lay. Then you'll find that their long, pointed beaks are good for more than just invading scented blooms. As you lie paralyzed from its sting, the Wynsel will busily make a cozy home for each of its hundred or so eggs.

Creatures of the Marsh

Chrondile Among the beasts of Maelbane, none is as single-minded as the infernal Chrondile. It sleeps most of its life away, totally immersed in the steamy stagnant waters of the Maelbane swamp. Yet, once its stomach is empty, the Chrondile surfaces to hunt. The Chrondile gives little warning of danger, with just two eyestalks gently waving above the water. But once its prey is within about five feet, the Chrondile's ropy tongue shoots with deadly precision. Covered with a sticky goo, the tongue bonds instantly to its catch. The helpless victim is slowly drawn into waiting jaws, and a happy Chrondile sinks beneath the marshy reeds to sleep and digest.

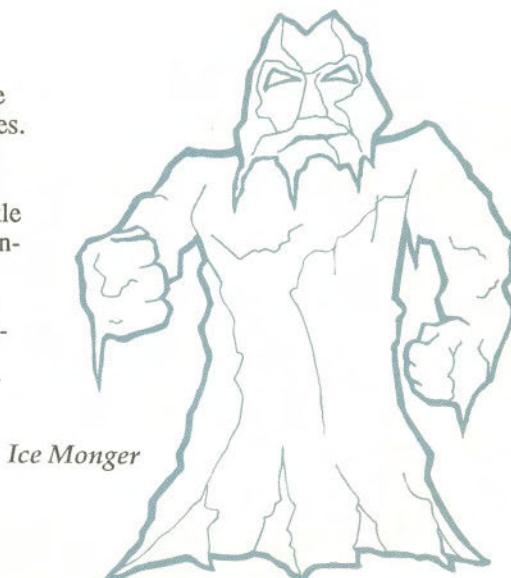
Mud Walker Dedicated scavengers, Mud Walkers patrol the wetlands of Maelbane, seeking food in the stagnant, fetid waters. Their large, webbed appendages and light weight allow them to skim rapidly across the bogs, scooping out the native eyeless fish which is the staple of their diet. In combat, Mud Walkers dance nimbly around their foes, slinging huge handfuls of rocks and quick-drying mud. Some adversaries have been buried alive before striking a single blow. It is reported that the swamps of Maelbane are dotted by many distinctive mounds, the former victims of the Mud Walker.

Clown Weed The Clown Weed was created by Archmage Moribund as an innocent gift to his ward, Princess Togamris. After her parents were eaten by the Ruby Dragon, the girl had turned stern and sober. It seemed that nothing could bring a smile to her perfect lips. Moribund had an idea. He worked his sorceries on the local plants, creating an entertaining and funny species to give to the sad princess. At first Moribund's heart was full of pride, for the solemn child was soon laughing along with the rest of the Court at the silly vegetative comedian. After a while, however, it became clear that the Weed would not stop, but would only get funnier and funnier. Clutching their sides, many died laughing.

Rock Wart These calcified monsters are daunting foes for even an experienced Maelbane warrior. To the eye, they seem harmless enough. Large chunky heaps topped with a small pointy beak, covered with cornsilk-fine hair. Yet battling such a creature is much like fighting a sack of gravel. While its foe hacks and slashes, the Rock Wart merely waits for its enemy to become entangled in the Wart's thin hair. Then, in a sudden spasm, the creature reels in all the filaments at once, impaling its victim on the Wart's sharpened beak. Once firmly attached, the Rock Wart leisurely sucks out the tender innards of its prey. Not known as a tidy creature, travelers are warned to watch for piles of "empties," a sure sign that Rock Warts lurk nearby.

Creatures of the Mountains

Ice Monger According to legend, a party of mountain explorers were awakened near sunrise by the hysterical shrieks of one of their comrades. They emerged from their shelter to find a great giant, covered with ice and dirty snow. The monster swung his screaming victim by the ankle and hurled him off the mountain with casual contempt. As the giant spun to face the horrified witnesses, they could see the first light of dawn sparkling through his body. Just then, the much-abused snow ledge beneath the monster's feet collapsed. He tumbled out of sight in a wave of frozen fury.



Wind Widow The scalding body temperature of this creature of flight gives it the ability to fire pure glass, much like a spider spins a web. It uses this talent to construct elaborate sparkling nests, much prized for their gemlike beauty. When frightened, the Wind Widow hovers on eight-foot wings, bombarding its attackers with jets of molten glass. This may be the origin of many of the curious Skull Crystals spoken of in Maelbane mythology.

Nimbus Climber With its shimmering covering of down, the Nimbus Climber appears fragile enough to blow away in the lightest breeze. Waving its agile limbs in curious patterns of beauty, the Climber hypnotizes its prey. Moving closer and closer, the Climber actually times its movements to the victim's heartbeat. Once the captive is completely entranced, the Nimbus Climber's movements, and the heart they control, gradually slow and stop.

Babbler Sporting two to four heads, these avian beasts seem at constant war with themselves. Screeching, spitting, and wild pecking fights are the norm between neighboring heads. Once food is sighted, however, the heads cooperate for the kill, as the unfortunate victim is pecked tens of times per second. Not surprisingly, as soon as the spoil stops moving the creature reverts to its quarrelsome nature, fighting over each and every mouthful.

Creatures of the Seas

Gas Drone The byproduct of this creature's digestive process is hydrogen, which it stores in an immense mottled dome. Buoyed by this uplifting gas, Drones float serenely on currents of air. Ranging far and wide over the oceans, they can climb over three miles high to spot prey. Larger Drones can hold up to 50,000 cubic feet of hydrogen, which gives them the carrying capacity for an impressive array of poison-tipped tentacles.

Hypnofiend Hiding beneath the ocean surface, the Hypnofiend attacks with waves of sheer mental agony. Sending out images of its enemy's worst nightmare, the Fiend feasts greedily on the terror it creates. A bit of advice: find your tormentor with haste, for with each passing moment you lose more and more of your sanity.

Tendro Pincer Small and crablike, these creatures are the nemesis of seagoing vessels. Extremely quick and agile, they will scuttle across a foredeck, compulsively cutting any lines within reach of their tough, serrated pincers. Within minutes a fully-rigged sailing ship can be completely immobilized, with collapsed sails draped across slashed rigging. The little crustaceans then turn their attention on the crew, patiently snipping and cutting. This might explain the tales of unguided ghost ships that sometimes drift into Maelbane's quiet bays.

Wave Thrasher This enormous squid-like creature is the most feared sea monster in Bantross. It rises from the depths to wrap its tentacles around an ill-fated ship and hauls the entire vessel under the waves. Once nestled on the ocean bottom, the Thrasher casually cracks the ship open like a shell and munches contentedly on the crew. If you get a choice, run instead of fight.

Dungeon Monsters



ew warriors ever enter the underground dungeons of Bantross, for they are inhabited by the disgusting remnants of the Mage Wars. Food is scarce in the dungeons, and only the fiercest and strongest creatures have survived. They sport an impressive array of talents. There are apparently creatures that can drain attributes, destroy armor, resist magic, and maybe even more.

In recent history, only two warriors ever made it out of the dungeons alive. Both of them were wrecks, hollow shells of who they once were. Suffice it to say, no details of their experiences ever passed their lips. We learned no names — no descriptions. Only by studying their horrible wounds did I learn something of the world in which they struggled.

Mind Trill



Credits

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